

How to create an inclusive customer experience

Guidebook



Disclaimer

This guidebook was developed by Inclusion Solutions and should be considered a resource document only.

It intends to provide the reader with knowledge and guidance to create an inclusive customer experience. The overall safety, accessibility, and inclusiveness of a business is ultimately their responsibility.

This guidebook is also intended to be used in conjunction with our training, a set of self-assessment checklists, and an access and inclusion plan.

Contact Inclusion Solutions if you haven't yet completed the inclusive customer experience training.

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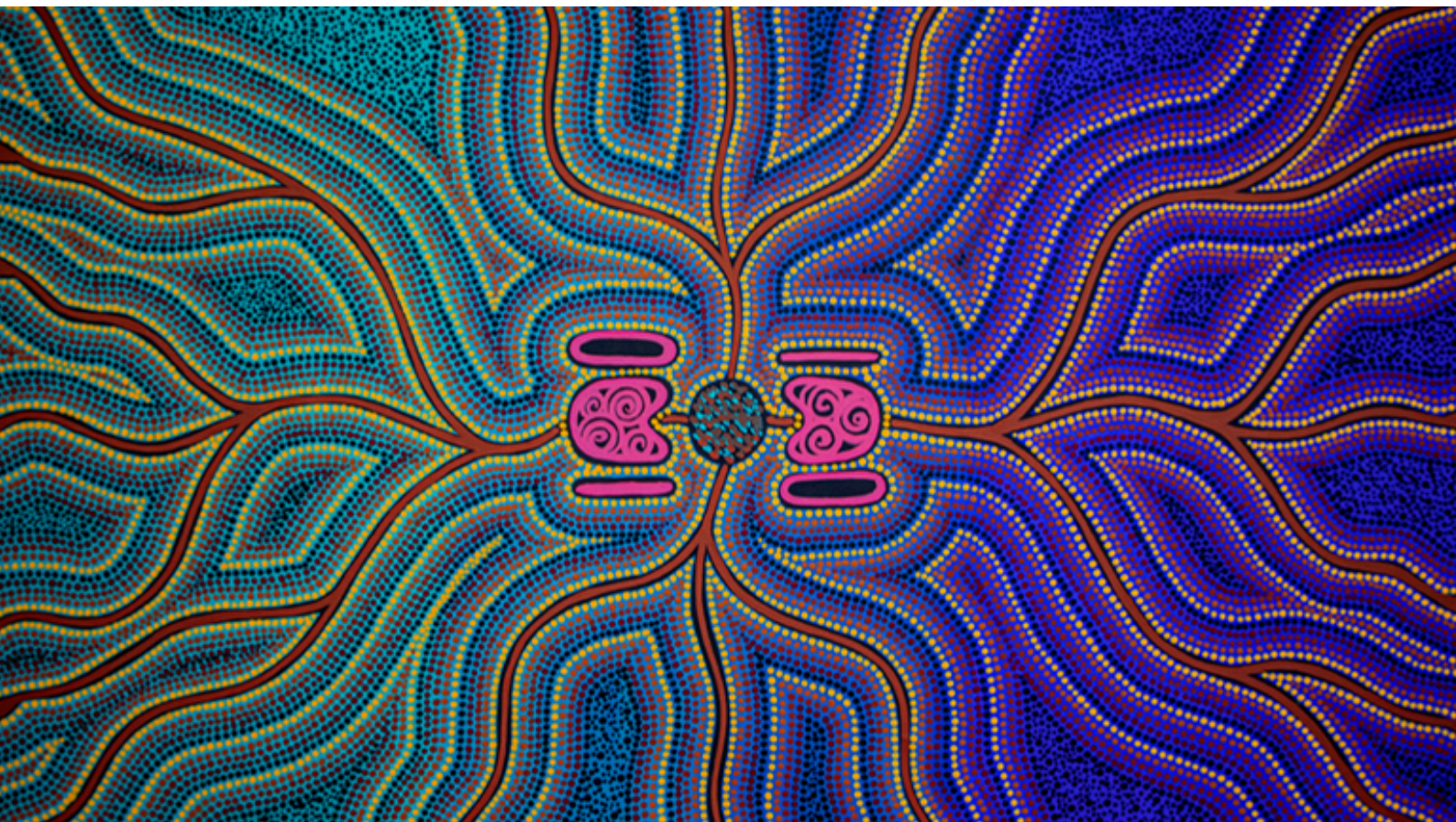
Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**



Kaya and welcome

Inclusion Solutions would like to acknowledge and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present.

We acknowledge the stories, traditions, and living culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land and commit to building an inclusive future together.



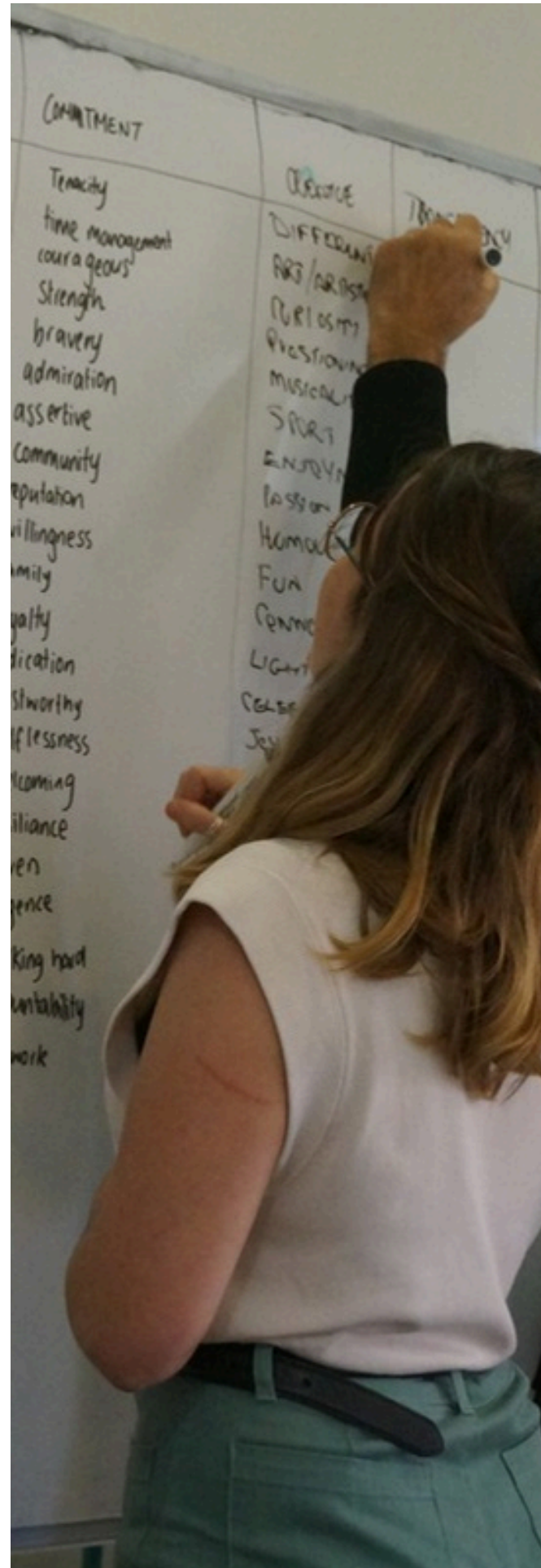
About us

Welcome to Inclusion Solutions, an organisation dedicated to unlocking the potential within every individual and community by creating opportunities for all people to be socially included.

We are a training and consultancy service that also delivers a diverse range of social impact projects in Western Australia and beyond. We collaborate with individuals, local and State governments, sporting associations, community services, businesses, local groups, and clubs to foster stronger, more inclusive communities.

Our focus is on more than just physical access; we emphasise the importance of feeling welcomed and included in one's community. Our passion lies in social inclusion.

Leveraging our extensive personal and professional experience, we help communities build on their strengths, seize opportunities, and implement ideas for lasting change. Through a community development approach, we understand and address common inclusion challenges, providing support to our partners so everyone can thrive!



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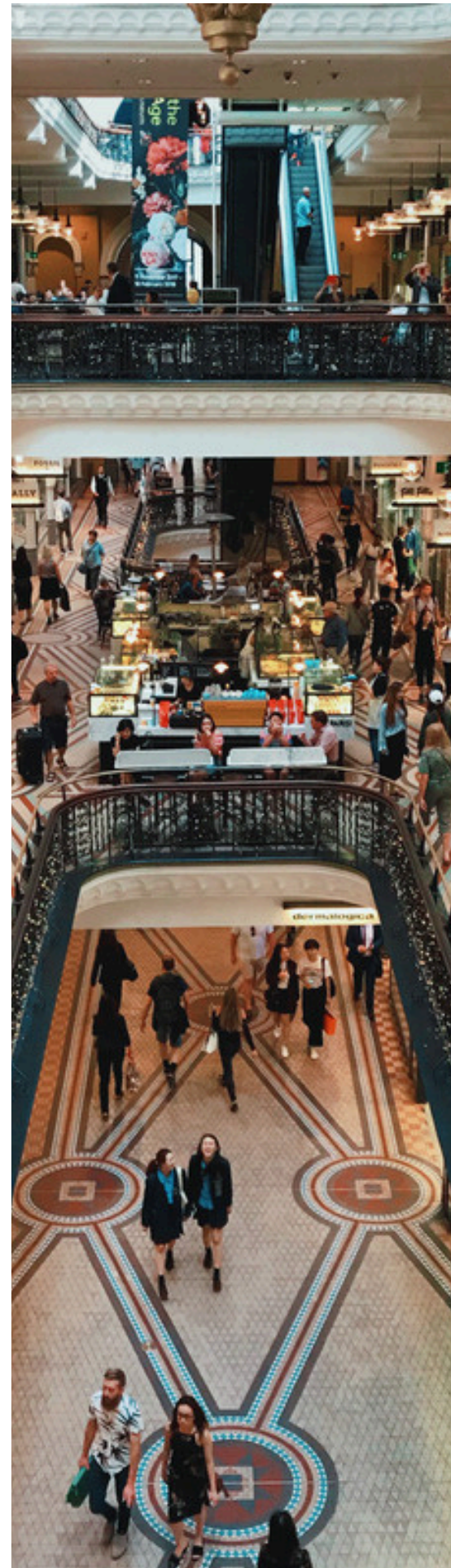
Foreword

The Open Doors Project, proudly funded by the Department of Communities through their Innovation Fund as part of the State Disability Strategy 2020-2030, is driven by a powerful vision: to foster greater disability awareness and understanding among West Australian businesses, paving the way for more inclusive communities for people with disability.

With a strong emphasis on creating an inclusive customer experience, this initiative aims to tackle some of the challenges that people with disability still face in their communities. While we acknowledge ongoing accessibility issues, our mission extends beyond that. We are committed to transforming staff attitudes and business practices, dismantling stereotypes surrounding disability, and promoting inclusive communication and marketing.

Through practical tips and innovative ideas, our goal is to empower businesses to embrace inclusivity and make a difference.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all individuals who contributed to this project. Our heartfelt thanks go to our dedicated working group members, all the individuals with lived experiences who generously shared their stories and experiences with us, and the businesses that welcomed us warmly. Your trust and input have been invaluable in bringing this project to fruition.



About this guidebook

By using this guide, you are taking a significant step towards making your business more inclusive of people with disability.

Together, we can create environments where everyone feels welcome, respected, and supported to purchase goods and services in their local community.



This comprehensive guidebook is designed to empower you to make your business more accessible and inclusive of customers with disability and other demographics. Creating a welcoming and safe environment isn't only the right thing to do, it also makes good business sense!

This guide aims to provide you with the knowledge, tools, and inspiration to make your business inclusive for all potential customers, regardless of their background and abilities.

What does it cover?

First, this guide delves into the many benefits of creating more accessible and inclusive businesses. Furthermore, it provides you with key information on disability to increase your awareness and confidence to better support customers with various disabilities. Beyond showcasing strategies to improve physical access, this guide also provides practical tips and tools to provide a more inclusive customer experience through implementing inclusive marketing and communication strategies, as well as flexible business practices. Finally, the guide contains a list of helpful resources and some real-world examples that highlight simple strategies to create more inclusive businesses.

Being inclusive is good for business

What is an inclusive business?

Being an inclusive business means providing your products and services in a way that ensures people of all abilities and backgrounds are welcome and treated with equity, dignity, and respect - whether they are employees, customers, or other collaborators.

Inclusion within your business can include everything from how people physically access your business to the attitudes of your staff.

What is the difference between accessibility and inclusive customer experience?

Accessibility involves removing barriers that prevent people with disability from physically and digitally accessing local businesses. Inclusivity goes a step further by ensuring that individuals with disability are recognised as welcomed and valued customers, allowing them to purchase goods and services with a sense of agency and dignity like anyone else.



“It’s not just about providing basic access to people, but it’s also about creating an environment in which people want to spend time and want to recommend to their friends because they know their friends are going to have a good time there.” *Nat, business owner*

Why does providing an inclusive customer experience matter?

Embracing accessibility and inclusivity can bring many benefits. You can expect increased revenue and a broader customer base, attracting not only individuals with disability but also their family and friends, and other people such as customers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, older adults, families with young children, etc.

By considering customers with disability you not only fulfill a social responsibility, but you also open the doors to a diverse range of consumers who are often loyal patrons.



Key benefits for your business:

- Increased revenue
- Wider customer base
- Increased customer loyalty
- Improved reputation
- Improved staff attraction and retention

For every \$1 a business invests in accessibility, it can generate up to \$13 in extra revenue.
(Monash University)

Additionally, your commitment to inclusivity can enhance your brand reputation, creating a positive public image that resonates with today's socially conscious consumers.

Finally, a strong focus on inclusivity cultivates a positive workplace culture and can improve employee attraction and retention.

Team members are also likely to feel more valued and engaged in an environment that is inclusive, leading to higher morale and increased productivity.

On the flip side, neglecting accessibility and inclusivity can pose significant risks to your business. Failing to adhere to the requirements and standards set by the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) as well as relevant State legislation and access Standards can expose your business to potential legal challenges and penalties.

Additionally, negative customer feedback can harm your reputation and result in lost sales.

Remember, it's not about achieving perfection but making meaningful strides toward inclusivity. Even small steps can lead to significant positive outcomes for your business, customers, and team.

Explore your options and take action to create a more accessible and welcoming environment. Your efforts will pave the way for a brighter, more successful future!

Making accessibility and inclusivity a priority is not just a legal and moral obligation; it's a strategic business decision that drives success!



“Word of mouth has definitely helped because it shows that we care and that we are trying to make a difference.” *Kylie, business owner*

Disability awareness basics

What is disability?

Inclusion Solutions, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified in 2008, recognises the definition of disability as including *“those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”*.

**In Australia,
1 in 5 people
have disability.
That's 5.5 million
people.
(ABS)**



“It's crucial to have a good attitude toward people with disability. I think the experience is something that people should embrace rather than step back from. You can learn a lot from people with disability. [...] Don't be afraid to ask questions. You don't have to wait for a person with disability to ask you a question.” *Crispin, customer*

Disability varies significantly from person to person

- A disability may be permanent or temporary and can be visible or invisible.
- Some individuals are born with disability, while others may acquire one or more disabilities later in life due to accidents, medical conditions, illnesses, or injuries.
- The level of support needed can change over time for some individuals, while others may have fluctuating or episodic disabilities.
- Some individuals may experience multiple disabilities, leading to diverse support requirements.



More than 1 in 7 people with disability use mobility aids. (AIHW)

90% of people with disability have an invisible disability. (AIHW)



“When you have a coffee shop with all the chairs squashed together and then when you're like me and you got your stick and you're a bit wobbly. [...] I just wish there was a bit more space for me to walk, [...] because it just makes life a little bit more easier.” Roslind, customer

Understanding disability and society

Over time, our view of disability has evolved. One important way of looking at disability is through the lens of the Social Model of Disability which emphasises that the challenges faced by people with disability are mostly caused by barriers in society, rather than being solely due to a person's medical condition or impairment. For instance, if someone uses a wheelchair, the barrier isn't the wheelchair but the lack of ramps and accessible spaces. Instead of treating disability as an individual problem to fix, this Model urges us to change our environment so everyone can participate equally.

People with disability face four types of barriers:

- Environmental – Buildings and services.
- Organisational – Procedures, practices, and culture.
- Attitudinal – Stereotypes and practices.
- Communication – Language, digital, and in person.



This way of thinking is the foundation of Australian laws and international conventions about disability rights.

It has played a big role in changing attitudes and making sure society includes everyone.

By removing barriers, we can create a world where people with disability have the same opportunities as everyone else!

**We all have a role
to play in
removing these
barriers!**

5 myths and misconceptions about people with disability

Myth 1: Disability is always visible

Fact: In Australia, 90% of people with disability live with an invisible disability. An invisible disability is not usually noticeable in everyday situations. Examples of invisible disabilities include depression, fibromyalgia, and autism. It's important to recognise that visible disabilities are not more valid than invisible ones. Another common myth suggests that people with invisible disabilities exaggerate their symptoms for attention, which is not true. Individual experiences should not be subject to debate.

Myth 2: People with disability always need help

Fact: Many individuals with disability lead independent lives, work, and have families, just like those without disability. Everyone may need help or guidance at times, regardless of their abilities. It's best to ask someone with disability if they need assistance and to help only if they are comfortable with the idea.





Myth 3: It's expensive and difficult to accommodate someone with disability

Fact: Often, small changes are sufficient, as highlighted in this guidebook. Customer stories from individuals with disability demonstrate that flexible and attentive customer service can significantly enhance accessibility, making these customers feel included and valued.

Myth 4: People with disability are “special” and courageous

Fact: Adjusting to a disability involves adapting to a new lifestyle rather than showcasing bravery or courage. While individuals with disability can be brave, just like anyone else, it's important to be mindful of how these terms are used. They can often be perceived as offensive or condescending when applied to someone with disability simply for existing.

Myth 5: People with disability are only comfortable with other people with disability

Fact: Historically, segregating individuals with disability into separate schools, workplaces, and institutions reinforced misconceptions about them. Today, most individuals with disability live regular lives alongside both people with and without disability. Anyone with disability should have the freedom to experience life in ways similar to others in their local community.

Inclusive language matters

Language matters because it shapes how we see each other.

Language is important because it affects how society perceives people with disability and influences how individuals feel about themselves.

Historically, ableist language has often been used to discuss disability. This includes offensive, derogatory, or negative terms that describe people with disability. Such harmful stereotypes create barriers to full participation in society and reinforce exclusion.

Language is constantly evolving, so let's keep learning and reflecting.

Person-first language versus identify-first language

People often have strong preferences for either person-first language or identity-first language.

Ask the person if in doubt. If that's not possible, use person-first language or refer to them by their name.





Person-first language places the individual before their diagnosis, recognising that people have multiple facets to their identities. This approach aims to combat stigma and emphasise the personhood of individuals. In Australia, this is generally the preferred terminology among individuals without disability when referring to people with disability.

Examples of person-first language:

- A person with low vision
- A person with learning disability
- A person with diabetes

Identify-first language acknowledges "disability" and "disabled" as integral aspects of a person's identity. This approach asserts that disability is not a source of shame and is preferred by some individuals and communities, particularly within the neurodivergent and Deaf communities.

Examples of identity-first language:

- Dimi is autistic
- Jarred is Deaf
- I am disabled

Inclusive language guide

Instead of...	Use...
Differently abled, Physically challenged, Special needs, People with disabilities	People with disability, Mohammad lives with disability, Betty has disability
Wheelchair-bound, Confined to a wheelchair	Wheelchair user, Marty uses a wheelchair
Paraplegic	Person with paraplegia
Suffers from, Afflicted by, Incapacitated	Lives with... Experiences... Has...
Neurodiverse person	Neurodivergent person
Hyper, Hyperactive	Person with ADHD
Able-bodied, Normal	Person without disability, Non-disabled person
Disabled parking, Disabled entrance, Disabled toilet	Accessible parking, Accessible entrance, Accessible toilet

**Disability
isn't a dirty
word.**

**Don't let your
fear stop you
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What is disability discrimination?



Disability discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably, or not given the same opportunities as others in a similar situation because of their disability.

What does the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) cover?

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their disability in various areas of public life, such as employment, education, access to services, renting or purchasing a home, and entering public spaces.

There are two types of unlawful discrimination:

- Direct discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favourably due to their disability.
- Indirect discrimination happens when a rule applies to everyone but has an unfair effect on people with disability.





Who is protected under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)?

The Act covers a wide range of disabilities, including physical, intellectual, psychosocial, sensory, neurological, and learning disabilities.

It also applies to individuals with illnesses, or medical conditions, as well as those with physical differences and work-related injuries.

Furthermore, the Act protects individuals with disability from discrimination if they are accompanied by a support person, such as an interpreter or a friend, a trained animal like an assistance dog, or if they use aids or equipment, such as a mobility device or hearing aid.

Finally, it includes past and future disabilities, and disabilities that individuals are presumed to have.

Businesses and organisations must provide equitable, respectful, and dignified services to customers with disability.

Are people with disability all impacted in the same way?

Research indicates that customers with intersecting identities are more likely to face negative experiences, microaggressions, and discrimination.

For instance, individuals with disability who also belong to a different cultural background or identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community are at a higher risk of experiencing discrimination compared to others.

Additionally, people with disability with higher support needs encounter more discrimination from businesses than those with lower support needs.



Customer accounts reveal that these negative experiences often stem from stereotypes, unconscious biases, and a lack of awareness and understanding, which result in acts of exclusion.

Of the Australians with disability aged 15 and over, almost one-third (33.1%) avoided situations because of their disability. One of the most common situations avoided was going to shops, banks, etc. (34.3%). *(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)*



What do customers with disability have to say?

“There have been many times where I've unfortunately felt excluded. One example of this is because of my slow speech. Due to my cerebral palsy, people just assume that they know what I'm looking for or they know what I want, and that's not necessarily the case.”

Madison, customer

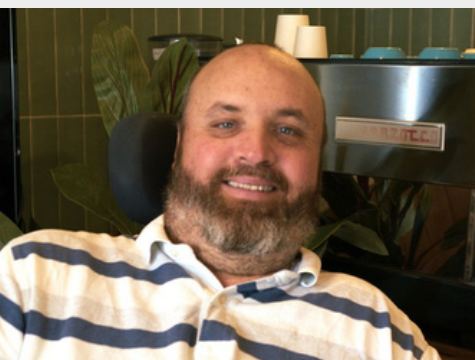


“It just makes you feel happy that someone has taken time out of their day to say "hi, how can I help you?" or "let me get that for you" if it's on a high shelf. It makes me want to keep coming back to the business and to recommend the business to other people.”

Grace, customer

“I found this beautiful dress but because I need to sit down to try it on and the changing room wasn't accessible, I asked if I could take it home to try it on. Because it was on sale, the staff said 'no, you won't be able to exchange it if it doesn't fit'. I just felt as though 'couldn't you just allow that one off?'”

Roslind, customer



“Getting on board on this sort of journey as soon as possible will only have positive impacts on the business, both in terms of customers returning and increased customers from word of mouth about their good experiences. It doesn't just benefit disabled people, it benefits everyone.”

Crispin, customer

Physical accessibility strategies

Enhancing your business' accessibility is vital for creating an inclusive environment and there are many ways to improve physical access without having to break the bank.

While some changes may require a larger investment, the long-term benefits, including increased customer loyalty and revenue, will far outweigh the costs. By prioritising accessibility, you can reach a broader audience and strengthen your business' reputation.

Enhancing business accessibility benefits not only customers with physical disability, but also those visiting your business with prams and young children, older adults, customers using trolleys, and even delivery professionals!



“A lot of the changes we made were less significant, but they made more of an impact than we actually realised.” *Kylie, business owner*



The Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010

The purpose of the Premises Standards is to make sure:

- Dignified, equitable, cost-effective, and reasonably achievable access to buildings and services within buildings is provided for people with disability and their family members, carers, and friends.
- Building certifiers, developers, and managers fulfill their responsibilities to people with disability under the Act.

The Standards came into effect on 1 May 2011 and apply to building work after this date.

They also specify how public buildings must provide access for people with disability. Finally, building codes from State and Territory governments follow the Premises Standards.

What can you do if you rent the premises?

- Provide accessibility information on your website on how to visit, listing the closest accessible toilets, parking bays, etc.
- Advocate for your landlord to upgrade the premises.
- Lobby your local council to install accessible parking bays, enhance pedestrian access, and improve nearby unisex accessible toilets.



10 ways to enhance physical accessibility

- 1** **Ensure there are accessible parking bays located close to your business entrance.** If this is not feasible, would your staff be willing to assist customers by carrying items to their vehicles?
- 2** **Install a permanent ramp at your entrance to improve access.** If your venue has stairs, adding handrails can still significantly assist many customers.
- 3** **Consider installing automatic sliding doors or an automatic door button.** Alternatively, consider keeping your entrance open during business hours. If neither is possible, provide a bell for customers to signal staff to assist with the door if required.
- 4** **Use clear signage throughout your premises.** Signs should feature easy-to-read fonts, high-contrast colours, and universally recognised symbols, especially for facilities like restrooms, exits, and directions.
- 5** **Adjust the height of your counter or service area so that individuals using mobility devices or those of shorter stature can see and engage with staff.** If adjustments are not possible, be prepared to assist them by coming around the counter. If you have a portable EFTPOS machine, bring it closer to the customer for easier access.





6

Provide a variety of seating options, including different heights and chairs with backrests and armrests. This will accommodate many customers, including young children, older adults, and anyone needing to wait for extended periods.

7

Rearrange furniture to create more space for movement and remove any clutter from the ground that could obstruct pathways and create trip hazards.

8

Place products on lower shelves to ensure that most people can reach them without assistance.

9

Ensure that unisex accessible toilets are clearly marked and kept clutter-free. If it isn't possible to create one, make sure staff know the location of the nearest accessible restroom.

10

Adjust lighting and noise levels to accommodate customers with sensory sensitivities, visual and auditory disabilities. Alternatively, consider providing a quiet space, specific quiet times or even noise-cancelling headphones.



Complete our Physical Accessibility Checklist to find out how accessible your business is and what other steps you can take!

Communication and digital accessibility strategies

Improving the accessibility and inclusivity of your communication and marketing enhances brand reputation by demonstrating that you genuinely care.

While some changes may necessitate additional resources, like upgrading your website, many improvements are easy to implement and can help broaden your customer base.

It's important to remember that a customer's experience begins long before they visit your business!



“The most important thing that businesses can do is provide information about their accessibility on their website and their event information because it makes such a big difference to people... It’s the easiest thing you can do.” *Nat, business owner*

10 ways to make your communication and marketing inclusive

- 1 Provide multiple methods for customers to contact and learn about your business, and what it offers.** This can include phone calls, emails, enquiry forms on your website, social media messaging, etc.
- 2 Upgrade your website to be compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).** If resources are limited, refer to our Communication and Digital Accessibility Checklist for simple, easy-to-implement suggestions.
- 3 Use easy-to-read fonts, high-contrast colours, and accessible sizing across all platforms and signage.** Arial, Helvetica, and Calibri are some of the most accessible fonts.
- 4 Include captions and image descriptions on all videos and social media posts.** Add Alt Text on images and graphics in all digital documents.
- 5 Use simple and inclusive language in all communication.** Avoid idioms and acronyms.





- 6** Incorporate pictures and internationally recognised symbols on your menus, signage, and other written materials.
- 7** Ensure that all your customers are represented in your communication; remember, an image is worth a thousand words!
- 8** Convert existing documents into Braille and Easy-Read formats.
- 9** Offer alternative communication methods on your premises, such as communication boards, pen and paper, iPads, etc.
- 10** Clearly communicate what your business offers; being clear is an act of kindness!



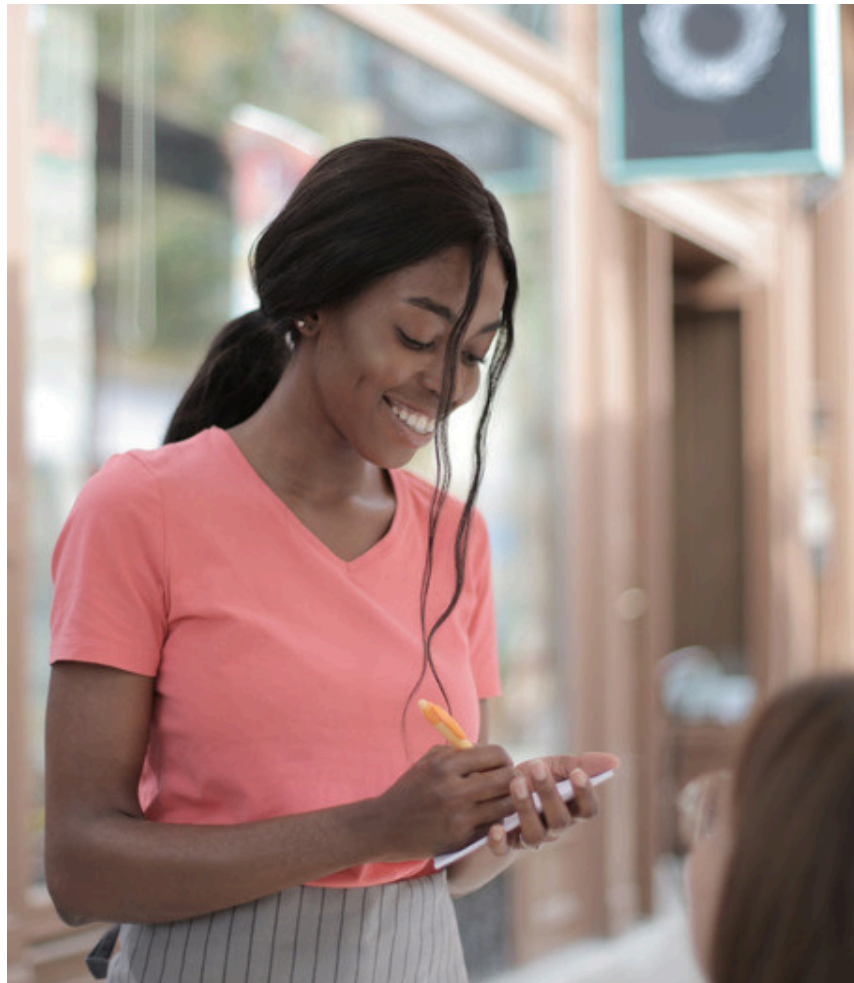
Complete our Communication and Digital Accessibility Checklist to find out how accessible your business is and what other steps you can take!

Customer service and business practice strategies

Individuals with disability who contributed their stories to this project consistently highlighted a common issue - it is often people's attitudes that hinder their ability to feel included and valued as customers.

The good news is that changing your attitudes and mindset are some of the simplest things you can do!

When communicating with a person who has disability, treat them like you would any other individual: with kindness, respect and patience.



“If someone isn’t able to come up to the till, it’s not hard for us to go and take their order at the table. It’s not standard practice, but it doesn’t mean we cannot do it either.”
Kylie, business owner

10 ways to foster inclusive customer service and business practices

- 1 Train your staff on disability awareness.** Investing in training will bring significant benefits for your business.
- 2 Focus on the person, not their disability.** Avoid making assumptions about what a person can or cannot do.
- 3 Use your regular tone of voice.** Speak naturally.
- 4 Adapt your business practices and be flexible when possible.** Even if it's not standard practice, consider whether a modification can enhance the experience for any particular customer.
- 5 Speak directly to the person with disability,** rather than addressing their support person.



“An inclusive environment is a really positive thing. It makes me want to go back to that venue. [...] I'll recommend it to others as well. Not just wheelchair users, but most of my friends are pretty keen on having their friend being able to access everything and will support businesses that support me.” *Crispin, customer*

- 6** **Ask before offering help.** Always enquire if the person would like assistance before stepping in. Respect their decision if they decline.
- 7** **Respect people's personal space. Do not touch or lean on someone's wheelchair or mobility device.** If you need to have a conversation with someone using a wheelchair, consider pulling up a chair or bending down to their eye level.
- 8** **Use inclusive and plain language.** Communicate clearly and simply with all customers, regardless of abilities or backgrounds.
- 9** **Be patient and apologise for mistakes.** If you make an error, take responsibility and be understanding.
- 10** **Be proactive in seeking feedback and be responsive to it.** Use this information to improve your services and address complaints effectively.



Complete our Customer Service and Business Practices Checklist to find out how inclusive your business is and what other steps you can take!



“Attitudes, it’s a really big one for me. Being patient [...] makes me and my friends feel included. Just asking me what I need support with, whether it’s carrying items like a coffee to a table or helping me read the menu [...]. It doesn’t have to be hard.” *Madison, customer*



Next are some additional tips for interacting with people with different disabilities. Implementing these strategies help ensure that your customers feel respected and have a positive experience with your business.

For people with learning, intellectual disabilities or brain injuries:

- Avoid overwhelming individuals with too much information at once.
- Do not speak loudly, slowly, or in a 'baby voice,' and avoid using a condescending tone.
- Use clear and simple language, avoiding complex words or jargon. If necessary, utilise symbols or pictures to provide options and clarify information.
- Allow the person ample time to ask and answer questions. Be patient and check for understanding throughout the conversation. Don't hesitate to rephrase your statements to enhance their comprehension.
- If you have difficulty understanding the person, do not pretend to understand. Instead, ask yes/no questions.
- Reassure the customer that you are available to assist them should they need more information or help.

For people who are Deaf or hard of hearing:

- Face the person so they can read your lips. Avoid standing in front of bright lights that may hinder visibility. If possible, learn some Auslan (Australian Sign Language), as not everyone can lip-read.
- Be mindful of background noise and try to move to a quieter area when possible.
- Speak in your normal tone and volume. Do not raise your voice unless requested.
- Direct your comments to the customer rather than to an interpreter or support person.
- Use pen and paper as a means of communication if needed.
- Employ clear gestures to aid in communication.

For people who are blind or have low vision:

- Introduce yourself by name, and when relevant, ask for the person's name so you can address them directly.
- Only offer assistance if the customer requests help to navigate. Ask which side you should be on and offer your arm for them to hold just above your elbow.
- Do not touch people without their consent; avoid pulling or dragging them.
- Make sure to clear any obstacles that may hinder a person's ability to navigate comfortably.

By following these easy guidelines, you will create a more inclusive and accommodating environment for everyone!

An inclusive business story

Making your business more inclusive for people with disability has significant benefits. This is something that Kim and Leigh at The House of Honey, a Swan Valley based café and meadery are well aware of! Find out more about how a focus on inclusion and accessibility has expanded their customer base, boosted brand image, and transformed their business for the better.



What motivated you to make your business more accessible and inclusive?

After a conversation with Tourism Council WA, they suggested we create an accessibility guide on our website to help people with disability assess whether our business could accommodate their needs if they were to visit. They also provided us with a list of several things we could implement in the business to improve access for people with disability. We started with the small and simple things. It was incredible to see how a few minor changes could drastically improve the experience for our visitors living with disability. We also recognised that this was a market we hadn't paid much attention to. From taking baby steps, it has cascaded into this whole new journey where we are not only implementing changes that are good for our business, but we're also making a change in our community.

What specific changes did you implement to enhance accessibility?

Some of the changes included adding an Accessibility tab on the website. By using photos, we wanted to showcase to visitors what they can expect when coming to us.

We updated menus with a bigger font and more contrasting colours. We added more signs around the premises and improved existing ones. We also updated the toilet seat to be safer. Additionally, when we built our new alfresco café area with a timber deck, we made sure to have a lot of flat surfaces and variations of seating heights and railings.



“Our best advice is just to get started. Start small, it doesn’t have to be perfect!”

What are some easy steps other businesses can take that don’t take too many resources (time and money)?

Make an inventory of what you already have and start communicating about it via social media channels and newsletters.

Also, educating yourself to help break down unconscious biases and attitudinal barriers is an effective way to get started and keep you motivated. But our best advice is just to get going! Start small, it doesn’t have to be perfect!

What do you wish you would have known at the start of your journey?

We thought it would be a big project to make our business more inclusive and accessible but when you break it down, it's not. There are so many simple and effective ways to increase accessibility and inclusion in your business - and the ripple effects can be enormous!

Throughout the journey, we've learnt that it's not necessarily about making big changes - such as installing a new door or a ramp - but small changes can also have a significant impact. Additionally, it's equally important to talk about what you already have! By being better at communicating about it, you're helping potential visitors with disability make informed decisions.

How have your customers responded to these changes?

The feedback has been great! Overall, café sales increased by 39%. Between 2023 and 2024, bookings from customers with disability increased on average by 66%. From a business point of view, it's been invaluable to tap into this new market.

Many of our customers hear of us via word of mouth – many visitors think we're doing a great thing, and they get behind the cause.

From a personal perspective, it's gratifying knowing that you're having a positive impact on the community and that we're providing a safe and comfortable space for all people to come and enjoy.





How has inclusivity impacted your workplace culture?

We've seen how our staff have become more mindful and helpful in their interactions with customers, as well as with each other. As a team, we've become much stronger. Seeing the positive changes in our staff, where they feel more fulfilled and valued in their roles, has been an unexpected benefit.

What benefits have you seen since making these changes?

Firstly, starting this journey has significantly improved our brand reputation. Our perception in the community has grown stronger, and a lot of our customers hear of us through word-of-mouth. It's very fulfilling knowing that people have such a good experience, so they want to tell their friends. Secondly, we feel much more confident, and it's become second nature to apply an "inclusion lens" to everything we do. Our goal is to make inclusion and disability awareness even more embedded in the business.

What advice would you give other businesses considering becoming more inclusive?

Just get started! Have an audit done and begin with the easy to implement initiatives so it doesn't feel overwhelming. You'd be surprised when you realise that most of the time, it's not about implementing costly initiatives, it's more about changing your mindset!

"It's not about implementing costly initiatives, it's about changing your mindset!"

Helpful resources

There are great resources freely available to businesses online. Browse some examples below:

- Arts Access Victoria, Universal access symbols list:
<https://www.artsaccess.com.au/resource/universal-access-symbols/>
- Australian Disability Network, It's not hard to be inclusive #RemoveBarriers video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0rLKe6B6j8>
- Australian Human Rights Commission, A brief guide to the Disability Discrimination Act: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/brief-guide-disability-discrimination-act>
- British Dyslexia Association, Dyslexia friendly style guide: <https://cdn.bdadyslexia.org.uk/uploads/documents/Advice/style-guide/BDA-Style-Guide-2023.pdf?v=1680514568>
- Centre for Inclusive Design, Accessibility testing tools: <https://centreforinclusivedesign.org.au/blog/2020/03/31/accessibility-testing-tools/>
- Centre for Inclusive Design, Easy English versus Plain English: A guide to creating accessible content: https://centreforinclusivedesign.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Easy-English-vs-Plain-English_accessible.pdf





- Colours, Colour palette generator with options to check contrast and potential impact depending on colour blindness: <https://colors.co/>
- Hidden Disabilities Sunflower: <https://hdsunflower.com/au/>
- K2K Signs, an Australian supplier of all signage needs such as braille signs: <https://www.k2ksigns.com.au/>
- People with Disability Australia, Language guide: A guide to language about disability: <https://pwd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/PWDA-Language-Guide-v2-2021.pdf>
- People with Disability Australia, The social model of disability video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qhwnrthy9gc&t=10s>
- Safety Civil, an Australian supplier of site safety solutions such as surface tactile indicators: <https://www.safetycivil.com.au/>
- Scope, Communication access information, resources, and products such as communication boards for businesses: <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/business-solutions/communication-access>
- Vision Australia, Introduction to digital accessibility free on-demand course: <https://www.digitalaccessstraining.com/courses/introduction-to-digital-accessibility>

Glossary of terms

Ableism: Discrimination or prejudice against people with disability, based on the belief that people without disability are superior. Ableism can manifest in various forms which include systemic barriers, stereotypes, and exclusion.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC): Methods of communication used to assist individuals who have difficulties with speech or writing, including tools like communication boards, speech-generating devices, and sign language.

Australian Sign Language (Auslan): The primary sign language of the Australian Deaf community, with its unique grammar and vocabulary, distinct from English.

Braille: A tactile writing system used by people who are visually impaired, consisting of patterns of raised dots that represent letters, numbers, and punctuation marks.

Communication Board: A tool that displays symbols, words, or pictures to aid individuals with speech or language impairments in expressing themselves.

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth): An Australian law enacted in 1992 that aims to eliminate discrimination against individuals with disability in various areas, including employment, education, and access to services and facilities.





Disability Access to Premises Standards 2010: Australian standards were established to ensure that buildings are accessible to people with disability, facilitating equal access to public premises.

Easy-Read: A method of presenting information in a clear, simple, and accessible way, often using straightforward language and supportive images, to ensure comprehension by individuals with cognitive disability.

Neurodivergent: An umbrella term describing people with variations in their brain functions compared to what is considered “neurotypical”, encompassing conditions like autism, ADHD, and dyslexia.

Plain Language: Communication that uses clear and straightforward expression, avoiding complex vocabulary and jargon, to ensure that the information is easily understood by a broad audience, including those with disability.

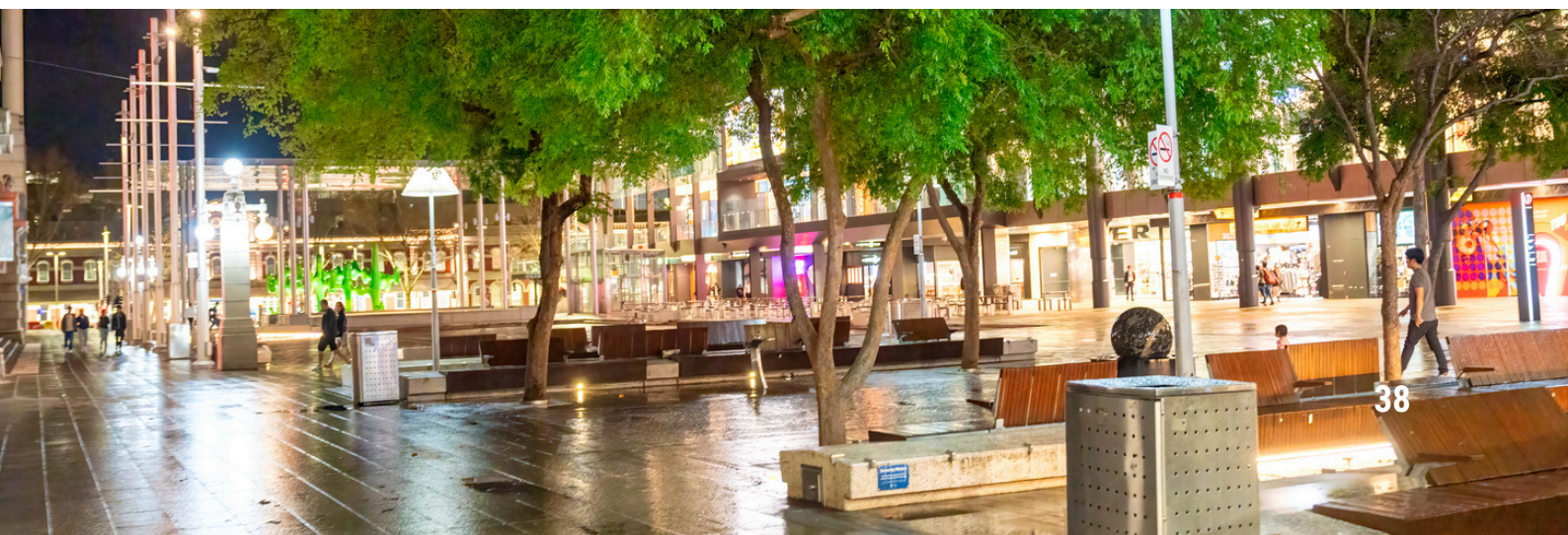
Quiet or Low Sensory Time/Space: Designated periods or areas in public venues or events modified to reduce sensory input (such as dimmed lighting and lowered noise levels) to accommodate individuals with sensory sensitivities, including those on the autism spectrum.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): An international treaty adopted by the United Nations to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disability. Australia ratified the CRPD in 2008, committing to uphold and promote these rights domestically.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG): The WCAG is an internationally recognised standard created by the World Wide Web Consortium. Its purpose is to define how to make web content more accessible to people with disability.

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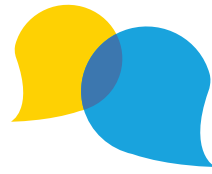
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